Introducing Proposed Architecture for a New Franklin – Dewey - Citizenry Observatory

(*Non-Agentic Civic AI*)

To Be Built in Washington, DC, and Operated by the Library of Congress

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(Written with the Support of Advanced AI – ChatGPT and Perplexity)

A Non-Agentic Civic AI Observatory for Democratic Visibility - This proposal imagines a different kind of AI monument on the banks of the Potomac: not a triumphal arch, but a civic observatory devoted to democratic visibility and the citizenry who must ultimately govern. The *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* is envisioned on or near Columbia Island, within the symbolic corridor between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, as an explicit alternative to triumphalist monumentalism in the nation's capital.

The proposed Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory, located on Columbia Island between the Lincoln Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery.

In this proposal, the observatory would be chartered as a public-works institution operated by the Library of Congress, aligning its mission with existing constitutional research and archival stewardship rather than with any single executive agency.

This observatory is not a tower from which the state peers down at its own population. It is a civic instrument built to give the citizenry a place within democratic governance, not to render citizens objects of continuous observation. Its primary *Telescopic Civic AI* instruments are digital, trained not upon the ordinary private lives of individuals, but upon large-scale civic signal environments: foreign-origin information operations, cross-platform aggregations of manipulative content, anomalous patterns within machine-mediated civic traffic, synthetic-media surges, cyber-social destabilization signals, and other systemic distortions that increasingly operate beneath ordinary democratic sightlines. The institution's purpose is therefore not citizen surveillance, but democratic visibility into the complex digital conditions shaping public life. In this way, the observatory seeks to extend civic visibility while preserving the privacy, dignity, and constitutional standing of citizens as self-governing participants rather than data subjects. This observatory would operate separately from, and would in no way constrain, U.S. military and law enforcement agencies.

The observatory's physical structure would speak in the language of early democracies rather than the futurist idiom of technocratic control. Two arches would recognize two American democratic theorists, Benjamin Franklin and John Dewey, but the largest arch would recognize the U.S. Citizenry as foundational. The liberal use of glass symbolizes the transparency necessary for both democratic process and for Non-Agentic Civic AI. The neoclassical design and white stone surface would complement the nearby Lincoln Memorial.

Franklin represents civic practicality, public works, and democratic maintenance. Dewey represents democratic learning, civic inquiry, and the continuing responsibility of citizens to govern themselves intelligently within changing social conditions. Our citizenry represents the constitutional source of democratic legitimacy itself, the people.

Above the entrance, a portico inscription could announce the observatory's governing principle:

"DEMOCRACIES CANNOT GOVERN WHAT THEY CANNOT SEE."

This is not a slogan for automation. It is a constitutional thesis in stone.

The observatory is conceived not as a command center for autonomous systems, but as civic infrastructure for shared seeing - an institution designed to extend democratic perception across increasingly complex digital environments so that human communities may deliberate and decide for themselves.

In an era increasingly defined by machine-speed information systems, synthetic media, opaque algorithmic environments, cyber conflict, and large-scale digital manipulation, democracies face a growing visibility crisis. Modern republics can no longer reliably perceive many of the conditions shaping their own civic life. Foreign information operations, coordinated digital destabilization campaigns, hidden optimization systems, and rapidly evolving AI infrastructures increasingly operate beneath the threshold of ordinary democratic awareness.

The *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* is proposed as a constitutional response to this new condition.

Under the dome, the observatory's work is organized through seven visible constitutional lenses - seven civic telescopes, each occupying its own floor and dedicated to a distinct domain of democratic life:

1. Security & Continuity
2. Liberty & Due Process
3. Privacy & Data Integrity
4. Expression & Information
5. Equality & Civic Fairness
6. Democratic Participation
7. Civic Tension

Together, these telescopes form a vertical stack of constitutional lenses rather than a singular intelligence apparatus: a climbable instrument panel for a republic that must watch over its own conditions.

Each telescope would function as a specialized visibility layer rather than a decision-making authority. Their purpose would not be to govern citizens, direct institutions, or automate public judgment. Their role would be narrower, quieter, and constitutionally safer: to illuminate systemic conditions that democratic societies may otherwise fail to perceive in time.

The observatory therefore embodies a fundamentally non-agentic model of Civic AI.

Machines illuminate; citizens judge. This distinction is foundational.

The institution would reject the increasingly common assumption that advanced civic intelligence must culminate in autonomous governmental action. Instead, the observatory would treat visibility itself as the central democratic requirement. Its systems would analyze patterns, identify vulnerabilities, surface civic risks, and provide structured public visibility - but final interpretation, deliberation, and legitimate action would remain fully human responsibilities.

Human analysts, constitutional scholars, civic professionals, public servants, journalists, technologists, and citizen representatives would occupy the observatory's deliberative spaces. The central hall would not resemble a shrine to machine intelligence. Instead, rings of transparent displays, analytical stations, and constitutional reference systems would surround a floor dedicated explicitly to inquiry, evidence, deliberation, and responsibility.

The imagery matters. The observatory intentionally rejects the symbolism of omniscient machine authority. It is designed instead to resemble a public observatory and a library - institutions historically associated with navigation, visibility, learning, and democratic maintenance.

This architectural language reinforces the observatory's deeper constitutional argument: that legitimate civic intelligence in a republic must remain structurally subordinate to the citizenry and to human conscience.

The inscription “CITIZENRY” quietly reverses the symbolic hierarchy common throughout Washington. Many monuments center leaders, abstractions, wars, or state power. This observatory instead centers the people themselves - not as passive subjects of technological administration, but as the enduring constitutional source of democratic legitimacy.

Its purpose is therefore not to replace democratic self-government with machine management. Its purpose is to help democratic self-government survive under increasingly complex technological conditions.

This distinction becomes especially important as nations around the world rapidly move toward integrating agentic AI systems into governmental environments.

Many proposals for governmental AI assume that the highest form of intelligence is the intelligence that acts most autonomously, predicts most aggressively, or optimizes most efficiently. But democracies face a unique constitutional challenge that authoritarian systems do not: democratic legitimacy depends upon preserving human judgment, public accountability, civic participation, and morally responsible citizens capable of governing themselves.

A republic may use advanced tools but cannot safely outsource conscience.

The *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* therefore advances a competing paradigm for democratic technological modernity: a technologically advanced institution whose legitimacy derives precisely from its architectural refusal to rule.

Its AI systems would remain constrained within carefully limited civic roles: visibility rather than command, analysis rather than coercion, illumination rather than optimization, and warning rather than autonomous intervention.

This model does not assume technological utopia.

It does not assume that democratic societies will become immune to manipulation, polarization, cyber conflict, or institutional stress. Nor does it assume that adversarial states will abandon increasingly sophisticated AI-enabled operations.

Instead, it begins from a more modest but historically grounded civic insight: democracies require sufficient shared visibility to preserve the possibility of self-government.

Without visibility, democratic judgment weakens. Without democratic judgment, constitutional legitimacy deteriorates. Without legitimacy, republics gradually lose the civic trust necessary to govern themselves peacefully.

The observatory is therefore best understood not as a machine for governing society, but as public infrastructure for preserving democratic orientation under machine-speed conditions.

In this sense, it belongs less to the tradition of centralized command systems than to the American tradition of civic maintenance projects: lighthouses, public libraries, weather services, observatories, constitutional courts, and other institutions designed not to dominate citizens, but to help free citizens navigate a complex world together.

The observatory ultimately proposes that the most democratically trustworthy civic intelligence may not be the intelligence that acts most powerfully. It may instead be the intelligence that most carefully preserves the conditions under which human beings may continue governing themselves.

What follows is the larger architectural and constitutional argument for the observatory as a buildable alternative paradigm for Civic AI in the United States - a non-agentic civic instrument designed to preserve, rather than replace, democratic self-government.

The Proposed *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory*

- An Alternative Paradigm for U.S. Civic AI -

Of course, any ensemble of *Non-Agentic Telescopic Civic AI* will need a closely monitored institutional home within U.S. government. The framework developed throughout this essay points toward a concrete institutional proposal: a *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* devoted to democratic visibility rather than machine sovereignty. Its purpose would not be to govern on behalf of citizens, but to extend public perception across machine-speed civic fields so that human communities can govern themselves more intelligently. In contrast to omnipotent agentic systems that seek a "stop bit" and terminal closure, such an observatory would embody *continuous resolution*: it would continuously clarify conditions without ever claiming the authority to decide for the republic.

The observatory bears two names because it stands upon two complementary democratic traditions within American civic thought. Benjamin Franklin represents the early republican intuition that public knowledge is itself constitutional infrastructure: libraries, correspondence networks, postal systems, learned societies, archives, observatories, and civic institutions built to illuminate rather than dominate. Franklin's tradition treats visibility, communication, and distributed public intelligence as practical instruments of self-government.

John Dewey speaks to a later democratic challenge that Franklin did not live to fully encounter: the problem of the "eclipsed public" within industrial and technological mass society. Dewey recognized that modern systems could become so vast, rapid, and mediated that ordinary citizens would increasingly struggle to trace consequences, recognize themselves as a functioning public, or meaningfully participate in democratic inquiry. Democratic failure, in this sense, is not only a failure of will but a failure of sight: invisible consequences, distorted communication fields, and unseen structures of influence that quietly steer attention and consent.

Together, Franklin and Dewey frame a single civic question for the machine age:

What kind of democratic instrument can help a constitutional people see itself clearly under conditions of systemic complexity without surrendering sovereignty in return?

A *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* answers that question architecturally. Designed as a constitutionally non-agentic system, it would remain barred from exercising civic authority or acting directly upon citizens. Its role would instead be observational and illuminative: processing large-scale civic data at machine speed, mapping distributions, surfacing anomalies, preserving institutional memory, and revealing hidden systemic patterns that would otherwise remain opaque to democratic society.

Where technocratic traditions increasingly respond to complexity by transferring judgment upward into expert classes and opaque systems, a Franklin - Dewey institution responds by extending democratic visibility outward to the public itself.

Responsibility would remain traceably human. The observatory would not optimize citizens, govern institutions, moralize outcomes, or replace democratic judgment. It would not decide which voices should prevail, nor would it censor or curate belief. Instead, it would treat visibility as the first civic duty of advanced systems - including visibility into the structures of manipulation, amplification, and coordinated influence that increasingly shape democratic perception itself. Before optimization, before automation, before delegation of authority, there must first exist intelligible public sightlines into how a democracy is actually functioning and how its communicative fields are being shaped.

Under such a framework, increasing machine intelligence would not culminate in a synthetic governor. It would culminate in increasingly capable civic instruments devoted to public visibility while refusing sovereignty by design. The observatory would therefore operate less like an automated ruler and more like a democratic public-works institution for collective perception: a machine-age extension of the lighthouse, the archive, and the public library. It might, for example, continuously map public spending flows in real time, while also charting the indirect consequences of policy across communities over years - giving citizens a longitudinal view of how decisions ripple through their shared civic life.

In that sense, the *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* proposes an alternative paradigm for U.S. Civic AI. Rather than asking how increasingly sovereign machine actors might be safely controlled after deployment, it asks whether constitutional democracies should instead build advanced civic intelligences whose legitimacy derives precisely from their architectural refusal to rule.

What some alignment models treat as a technical problem of containing synthetic governors, this framework treats as a civic problem of furnishing a constitutional people with enough shared visibility to recognize itself as a public capable of democratic judgment.

Franklin and Dewey would almost certainly agree that sustaining democracy, and stewarding any new civic instruments built in its name, requires the ongoing engagement of the American people - not merely an elite class of technologists or government administrators, however well-intentioned they may be. This book, with its proposed observatory, therefore seeks guidance from both traditions. It will argue that Civic AI alignment is not merely a technical achievement, but a democratic civic practice - a continuous pursuit of democratic ideals and civic digital resolution through participation, institutional restraint, and public responsibility.

The U.S. Citizenry (Conscience)

Yet Franklin and Dewey are not the only pillars upon which this proposal rests. Beneath both lies a third and older stratum: human conscience within our citizenry as moral inheritance. Conscience represents the ancient foundation beneath democratic life itself - the pre-political human capacity to recognize obligation, bear moral weight, and answer for the consequences of one's choices. Each citizen carries this inheritance individually and remains responsible for exercising it, imperfectly but sincerely, in service of the shared moral life upon which democratic self-government ultimately depends. The combining of diverse citizens with experts in interdisciplinary panels is essential.

Upon that foundation, Franklin presents democracy as a fragile historical legacy requiring continual maintenance through civic infrastructure, visibility, and public institutions that help a free people see clearly enough to govern themselves. Dewey, by contrast, presents democracy as a continuous reconstruction renewed through communication, education, collaborative inquiry, and each generation's ongoing civic development.

Together, Franklin, Dewey, and Human Conscience form a triadic civic architecture for democratic life under technological modernity: Conscience as moral foundation, Franklin as visibility infrastructure, and Dewey as democratic pedagogy.

These perspectives are not treated here as competing democratic theories, but as layered civic realities operating simultaneously across time. Within this framework, Civic AI does not replace any of these layers. It builds visibility infrastructure in Franklin's spirit, serves a learning public in Dewey's sense, and remains structurally barred from crossing the categorical boundary developed throughout this work: that the light of conscience cannot be delegated to machines, even as their amoral clarity helps a constitutional people see more clearly where that light must still decide.

Franklin and Dewey may help democratic societies collect, organize, interpret, and continuously clarify civic reality under conditions of immense technological complexity. But neither visibility nor pedagogy can relieve a constitutional people of moral responsibility itself. Democracies ultimately survive because citizens remain willing to bear the burdens of judgment, sacrifice, restraint, obligation, and shared consequence together.

Visibility may clarify consequence. Pedagogy may deepen understanding. But neither can relieve citizens of the burden of deciding what must be sacrificed, protected, forgiven, restrained, or defended together.

For that reason, a *Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory* must not become a technocratic instrument operating above the public, but a civic institution that continuously invites the public back into democratic perception, inquiry, and responsibility. Its purpose is not to replace the influence of citizens, but to help citizens see more clearly.

However we choose to design U.S. Civic AI, we must accept its limitations. Civic AI can clarify the field of consequence, but human conscience must forever bear the burden of moral trade-offs and sacrifices, and navigate the field of meaning. No amount of structural sophistication or democratic process engineering will ever change this.

Unlike the people who might one day enter this proposed new building, non-agentic Civic AI will never feel the icy wind blowing off the Potomac River in winter, and it will never carry the true burdens of consequential moral choice. But it may still play a critical role in our shared future, continually refining our foreign-based *Civic Digital Field* to inform human judgment. Its *Digital Nature Integrity* - the boundary that distinguishes artificial intelligence as a non-living, non-sentient system rather than a moral, biological, or social being - can be appreciated for its refusal to confuse human moral agency with machine capability. Its *Amoral AI Civic Advantage* - the design insight that artificial intelligence's lack of conscience or moral experience can become a civic strength when properly constrained - allows it to illuminate civic digital patterns impartially. And in a pluralistic

society, a system without ego, identity, desire, fear, or a moral agenda can offer something many humans struggle to provide: clarity without coercion, illumination without judgment, and assistance without taking a side.

From National Observatory to Public Civic Visibility Beacon

As a further civic safeguard and interpretive aid, the observatory could incorporate a simple, publicly visible Civic Barometer signal within its illuminated glass dome - a modern national beacon for the civic digital field. In this model, the dome's illumination would reflect only the assessed condition of the overall civic digital environment, not any particular policy, party, or locality. A green dome would indicate normal, manageable conditions; an amber dome would indicate elevated concern across multiple civic indicators; and a red dome would be reserved for rare periods of severe systemic stress requiring heightened democratic attention.

The dome signal would remain strictly non-agentic. It would not issue orders, trigger automated responses, direct citizens' conduct, or authorize governmental action. Instead, the observatory's governing board - operating under transparent statutory rules and constitutional constraints and housed within the non-partisan institutional framework of the Library of Congress - would determine when underlying civic indicators had crossed published thresholds sufficient to justify a color change. Those thresholds, along with the indices informing them, would be publicly documented, auditable, and subject to periodic review. In this way, the beacon would behave not as a hidden algorithmic governor, but as visible democratic infrastructure: a shared, contestable civic signal that citizens, journalists, scholars, public officials, and civic institutions could continuously scrutinize, question, and debate - while the board itself remains an auditor of the data rather than a political curator of its message.

The constitutional significance of such a signal lies less in the specific color displayed on any particular evening than in the fact that the warning itself quietly remains visible in public view. When the dome is amber or red, the republic itself is placed on civic notice that conditions within the broader digital environment warrant heightened democratic attention. Citizens, governors, local officials, technologists, and critics would remain entirely free to debate whether concerns are overestimated or underestimated, whether the indicators themselves are appropriate, and what responses, if any, are justified. But the visibility event itself could not be quietly buried or erased from public awareness while the signal remained active. Under this model, the observatory does not force agreement; it forces shared visibility.

Operationally, the national beacon would preserve federalism rather than displace it. The observatory would provide a single macro-level civic visibility signal together with accompanying public measurements, while states, localities, media institutions, schools, civic organizations, and citizens would retain full responsibility for determining how to interpret and respond to that information within their own communities. In practice, local news broadcasts might display the dome's color alongside weather reports; schools might use amber periods to strengthen civic and digital literacy education; local governments and infrastructure providers might evaluate continuity measures under elevated conditions; and citizens themselves might simply choose to pay closer attention to the health of their shared civic environment. The observatory illuminates; states interpret; localities adapt; citizens deliberate.

Far from inciting panic, such a system could normalize civic visibility in much the same way that weather alerts, hurricane cones, wildfire maps, and air-quality indices already help societies navigate ordinary conditions of risk, with the underlying indices mathematically normalized and periodically recalibrated so that shifts in the beacon's color remain responsive to real changes in the civic field rather than settling into a permanent, numbing "always amber" state. Human existence has always required navigating uncertainty. A hurricane warning does not extinguish liberty; it expands the range of rational and informed response under conditions of potential danger. So too with a civic beacon. Over time, citizens would learn that green does not mean perfection, amber does not mean collapse, and red does not mean hopelessness. Instead, the colors would become part of an ongoing process of civic orientation and democratic literacy within a machine-speed world.

In this sense, the illuminated dome would function not as a command beacon for centralized authority, but as a constitutional public-works instrument rooted in the older American tradition of lighthouse beacons, observatories, weather services, libraries, and civic warning systems designed to help free citizens navigate together without surrendering self-government in return. Like Franklin's public-lighting and lighthouse advocacy, the observatory would extend shared visibility outward into conditions that increasingly exceed ordinary human perception while preserving judgment, responsibility, and moral authority fully within human hands.

Its deepest democratic principle would remain simple: no privileged class should possess exclusive civic sight. In a constitutional republic, everyone sees the same beacon.

Modern conversations surrounding advanced AI often carry a quiet message of democratic exhaustion: that the world has become too fast, too complex, and too fragile for ordinary citizens to govern themselves, and that our only realistic path forward is to construct increasingly sophisticated systems capable of managing society safely on our behalf. Beneath the language of optimization, alignment, and machine governance lies an implicit philosophy of displacement - the assumption that civic responsibility must gradually migrate away from human communities and upward into synthetic systems and expert managerial structures.

The framework developed throughout this essay rejects that premise. It assumes instead that constitutional democracies remain capable of self-government if citizens are given the civic instruments necessary to see clearly enough together. The answer to complexity is therefore not the replacement of democratic judgment, but the restoration of democratic visibility. We do not need synthetic governors to inherit the republic from us. We need civic visibility infrastructure and renewed democratic institutions capable of helping free citizens perceive reality clearly enough to govern themselves responsibly within a machine-speed world.

If democratic societies can build civic digital visibility infrastructure, sustain public learning under conditions of machine-speed complexity, and preserve the citizenry's conscience, self-governance can remain possible.

Benjamin Franklin famously wrote: "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." In the short term, many AI developers and government officials are now rushing to install agentic AI in our government offices at all levels. But when our American citizenry eventually finds that AI to be both unsafe and restrictive of liberty, they will demand its removal. Enormous investments of money, time, and effort will be lost. At that time, the option of *Non-Agentic Telescopic Civic AI* will be waiting: technologically feasible, constitutionally limited, and offering the visibility capacity that is essential for our continued self-governance.